

Message Text

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ACTION EA-13

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LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, KS

SUBJECT: KOREAN DOMESTIC SITUATION

SUMMARY: IN PAST WEEK THERE HAS BEEN CONTINUED HEATING UP OF THE KOREAN DOMESTIC POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE. STUDENT PROTESTS AND UNREST CONTINUE AND THERE ARE MANIFESTATIONS OF ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTS OUTSIDE THE UNIVERSITIES. WHILE STILL SMALL AND WELL WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT'S ABILITY TO HANDLE, THESE PROTESTS ARE EVIDENCE OF WIDER PUBLIC CONCERNS ABOUT PRESIDENT PARK'S MANNER OF RULE. PRESIDENT PARK DEPENDS ON THE POLICE/ADMINISTRATIVE APPARATUS AND PASSIVE SUPPORT OF THE MILITARY. THESE COERCIVE CONTROLS APPEAR SUFFICIENT FOR PARK'S PURPOSES, BUT THERE IS A POLITICKZ VOLATILITY IN THE KOREAN SITUATION WHICH CANNOT BE IGNORED.

1. IN PAST WEEK THERE HAS BEEN CONTINUED HEATING UP OF THE DOMESTIC POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE. STUDENT PROTESTS AND UNREST CONTINUE, FOCUSING PARTICULARLY ON SEOUL NATIONAL UNIVERSITY (SNU). TONGA ILBO SITIN AND DEMONSTRATION BY NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR THE DEFENSE OF DEMOCRACY ARE MANIFESTATIONS OF ANTI-GOVERNMENT PROTESTS OUTSIDE OF THE UNIVERSITIES. AS NOTED BEFORE THESE ARE EVIDENCE OF WIDER PUBLIC CONCERNS AND DISQUIET

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ABOUT REPRESSIVE, HIGHLY AUTHORITARIAN RULE IN KOREA.

2. IN PRESENT POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT THERE IS SYMPATHY IN EDUCATED CIRCLES FOR THE STUDENT ANTI-GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES WHICH HAVE

TAKEN PLACE SO FAR. AMONG THE INTELLECTUALS AND IN CHRISTIAN ORGANIZATIONS THERE IS CRITICISM AND A READINESS TO VIEW PARK GOVERNMENT AS UNDESIRABLE DICTATORIAL REGIME. SO FAR, THESE SENTIMENTS HAVE BEEN PASSIVE BUT THERE ARE SIGNS OF GROWING MILITANCY, PARTICULARLY IN CHRISTIAN CIRCLES.

3. EVEN USUALLY PLIABLE OPPOSITION NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY (NDP) IS NOW ATTEMPTING TO EXPAND THE LIMITS OF POLITICAL CRITICISM ALLOWED IT BY THE GOVERNMENT. NDP LEADERS ARE REACTING TO, NOT LEADING, EVENTS. BUT THEIR READING OF SITUATIONS IS THAT CURRENT PUBLIC ATMOSPHERE WILL INHIBIT GOVERNMENT PARTIES, AND ROK CIA, FROM INTERFERING UNDULY WITH THEIR BROADER CRITICISMS OF GOVERNMENT.

4. FOR ITS PART, GOVERNMENT RECOGNIZES THAT IS HAS A PROBLEM ON ITS HANDS, PARTICULARLY WITH REGARD TO STUDENTS. POLICE AGENCIES HAVE TO DATE BEEN SUCCESSFUL IN BLOCKING ABORTIVE ATTEMPTS BY STUDENT ACTIVISTS ON OTHER CAMPUSES TO COORDINATE SIGNIFICANT ANTI-GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES IN SUPPORT OF SNU STUDENTS. THIS HAS BEEN DONE BY HEAVY SURVEILLANCE OF CAMPUSES, SELECTIVE ARRESTS, AND CONTINUING PRESSURE ON FACULTY AND STUDENT LEADERS. NEVERTHELESS, KYONGPUK UNIVERSITY DEMONSTRATION OCCURRED ON NOV 5, A RALLY DREW STUDENTS ATINU ON NOV 7, AND THERE IS INCREASING POSSIBILITY THAT SIMILAR DEMONSTRATIONS MAY TAKE PLACE ON OTHER CAMPUSES.

5. GOVT'S TACTICAL EFFORT AT MODERATION IN RELEASE OF MOST OF THE ARRESTED SNU STUDENTS HAS NOT QUIETED SITUATION AT SNU, WHICH REMAINS DIFFICULT. HOWEVER, SENIOR GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS PROFESS CONFIDENCE THAT THEY HAVE GENERAL STUDENT SITUATION IN HAND, AND THEY ARE NOW USING MORE SELECTIVE APPROACH IN IDENTIFYING AND NEUTRALIZING LEADING STUDENT AGITATORS WHILE HANDLING OTHER STUDENTS IN MORE RESTRAINED, MODERATE FASHION. IN ADDITION, GOVT HAS UNDER STUDY FOR LONGER TERM MORE SOPHISTICATED CONTROL MECHANISMS, PUTTING LESS OVERT DEPENDENCE ON ROK CIA, TO TIGHTEN ITS GRIP ON STUDENTS AND FACULTY.

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YM WITHIN GOVT, HOWEVER, SOME PRO-GOVERNMENT POLITICAL FIGURES ARE EXPRESSING THEIR OWN PERSONAL CONCERN OVER GENERAL SITUATION AND WHAT THEY SEE AS PRESIDENT PARK'S ISOLATION AND RIGIDITY THE COMMON STORY WE NOW HEAR IS THAT PARK NEITHER SEEKS NOR DESIRES INDEPENDENT VIEWS. HE IS UNDOUBTEDLY WELL INFORMED ABOUT THE PROBLEMS HE FACES, BUT FOLLOWS HIS OWN JUDGMENT OF HOW TO DEAL WITH THEM. MANY OF HIS FORMER CLOSE ASSOCIATES AVOID APPROACHING HIM WITH UNPALATABLE ADVICE, AND DESPITE TACTICAL MODERATION OF PAST WEEKS, PARK REMAINS DETERMINED TO MAINTAIN FIRM CONTROL AND TO SUPPRESS PROTEST. AMONG SOME GOVERNMENT SUPPORTERS THERE ARE ALSO GROWING, IF STILL MUTED, CALLS FOR REMOVAL OF CIA DIRECTOR YI HU-RAK AND DOWN-PLAYING OF CIA ROLE TO

IMPROVE GOVT'S RELATIONS WITH ITS CRITICS. WHAT THE OUTCOME WILL BE IN THIS REGARD IS NOT CLEAR, BUT WE CONSIDER THAT YI'S PERSONAL ROLE IS MORE CLEARLY RESTRICTED IN COMPARISON TO HIS PREDOMINANT INFLUENCE A YEAR AGO.

7. ANNOUNCED SETTLEMENT OF KIM TAE-CHUNG CASE AND HIS RELEASE FROM HOUSE ARREST HAS NOT SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVED THE INTERNAL SITUATION. WHILE KOREANS ALREADY BELIEVED KIM TAE-CHUNG WAS KIDNAPPED BY ROKG, THEY HAVE INTERPRETED THE ANNOUNCED SETTLEMENT OF CASE AS EXPLICIT ADMISSION OF GUILT. OPPOSITION HAS THUS BEEN ABLE TO FURTHER JUSTIFY CHARGES THAT PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT TO TOKYO WAS A SHAMEFUL OCCASION FOR APOLOGY.

8. SO FAR THE GOVT, FOR ITS OWN PURPOSES, WISHES TO RIDE OUT THE CURRENT PROTESTS WITHOUT RESORTING TO UNDUE VISIBLE REPRESSION. IT RECOGNIZES THAT ITS IMAGE HAS ALREADY SUFFERED TOO MUCH INTERNATIONALLY, AND IT WISHES TO DO NOTHING TO JEOPARDIZE THE NORMALIZATION OF RELATIONS WITH THE JAPANESE SUBSEQUENT TO THE SETTLEMENT OF THE KIM TAE-CHUNG CASE. HOWEVER, THERE IS NO QUICK END TO THE UNIVERSITY SITUATION AND THE GOVT CAN DO LITTLE IN THE SHORT TERM TO REVERSE THE ANTI-GOVERNMENT ATTITUDES PREVALENT IN SUCH KEY ELEMENTS OF THE SOCIETY AS THE PRESS, RELIGIOUS GROUPS, THE INTELLECTUALS AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, THE STUDENTS. CONSEQUENTLY, IN THE NEXT WEEKS WE SEE THE LIKELIHOOD OF CONTINUING ANTI-GOVERNMENT ACTIVITY.

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9. WE BELIEVE GOVT WOULD PREFER TO CONTINUE TO HANDLE THESE PROTESTS QUIETLY; AND, WHILE THEY ARE MORE VISIBLE, THE PROTESTS DO STILL INVOLVE VERY SMALL NUMBERS, WELL WITHIN GOVT'S ABILITIES TO MANAGE, HOWEVER, THERE ARE EMBRYONIC EFFORTS AMONG CHRISTIANS AND STUDENTS, PARTICULARLY, TO COORDINATE LARGER PROTEST ACTIONS, DESPITE THE OMNI-PRESENT POLICE AGENCIES. THERE IS ALWAYS THE CONCOMITANT POSSIBILITY OF QUICK REPRESSIVE REACTION BY THE GOVT IF IT VIEWS THE SITUATION AS GETTING OUT OF HAND.

10. THE GOVERNMENT HOPES THAT BUMPER CROP AND STRONG ECONOMIC GROWTH OVER PAST YEAR WILL WEIGH IN ITS FAVOR. THE SCHOOL WINTER VACATION BEGINS IN EARLY DECEMBER AND IT APPEARS THAT GOVERNMENT EXPECTS TO KEEP THINGS UNDER CONTROL ON CAMPUS UNTIL THEN. BUT PRESIDENT PARK'S RULE NOW DEPENDS HEAVILY ON THE ACTIVE RECOURSE TO THE POLICE/ADMINISTRATIVE APPARATUS AND THE PASSIVE SUPPORT OF THE MILITARY. FOR THE PRESENT, THESE COERCIVE CONTROLS APPEAR SUFFICIENT FOR PARK'S PURPOSES. HOWEVER, THERE IS A POLITICAL VOLATILITY IN THE KOREAN SITUATION, DIRECTLY TRACEABLE TO PRESIDENT PARK'S MANNER OF RULE, WHICH CANNOT BE IGNORED.

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